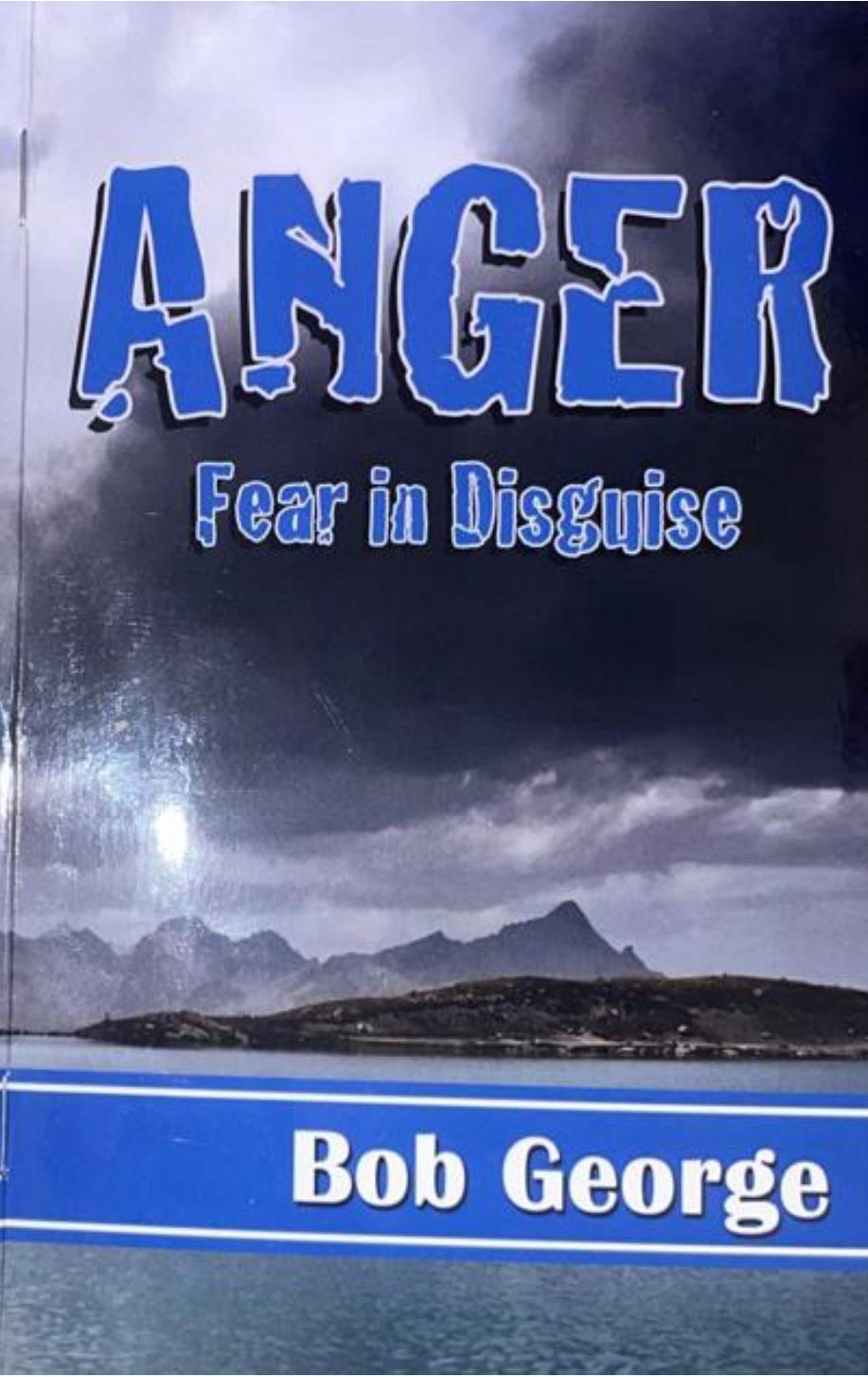


ANGER

Fear in Disguise



Bob George

Anger: Fear in Disguise

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JOE'S VOICE TREMBLED with emotion, as he told his story. The tension between him and his wife had been increasing for some time, with arguments getting louder and more frequent. Yesterday was the last straw; she was leaving Joe unless he agreed to seek counsel.

"What can I do about my temper?" Joe asked. "I really do love Cindy, but I just end up acting like a maniac around the house. It's happening at work too. I'm going to get fired at this rate."

"I try to control my anger, but I blow up anyway. I've confessed it and asked God to forgive me a hundred times, but nothing changes. What is the answer?"

I asked Joe a few questions to gather some information, then told him something that surprised him: "Frankly, Joe, your real problem isn't anger; that's just a symptom. The reason that you are outwardly such an angry person is that, inwardly, you are a fearful person. **Your anger is a secondary response to fear.**"

I am used to people initially reacting with surprise at this, and Joe was no exception. I have found fear to be the hidden root beneath multitudes of individuals' outward problems. Some of the outgrowths of fear are anger, depression, self-pity, frantic activity, and all forms of escape behavior, including drinking, drug usage and fantasizing.

"Here an illustration to show you what I mean, Joe," I continued. "Let's say that you were walking down a dark street at night. I am a friend of yours who sees you and decides to pull a practical joke on you. What is your first response?"

"Fear," Joe answered.

"Right, and when you see that it is just me, and I am collapsing in hysterics at your reaction, what is your second response?"

"I'd probably want to kill you!"

"And," I continued, "how do you think you would respond if this happened over and over again?"

"I guess I would be angry and jumpy about all the time."

Joe is right. Fear is such a paralyzing, terrible emotion, that we respond in anger at having been subjected to it, and a person who continually lives in fear will manifest it through being continually angry.

Through failing to understand this, many people live in a futile cycle of trying to deal with the outward symptoms of anger without ever identifying the fears that are the cause of it all. It is like trying to weed your yard by merely pulling the heads off the weeds. The roots are untouched, and they will be back shortly.

THE FEAR/ANGER CONNECTION

Whenever I meet someone who is chronically angry, I have learned to look underneath to discover that chronic *fears* this individual has. In spite of people's diligent and persistent attempts to deal with anger, they will never find relief until they get to the real root, which is the fear that is triggering it.

The fear/anger connection can be seen in many everyday situations. I remember once when I was eleven or twelve years old going to the local YMCA after school with a buddy. The only problem

was that I neglected to tell Mom about the great idea. I was having such a good time swimming that the hours passed unnoticed, and it was about 8:30 before I got home.

There I was: whistling up the walk, oblivious to any problem, when my parents burst from the house demanding, "Where have you been?" When they found out, the fire in their eyes was matched only by the heat of my seat.

A few minutes before, they were wringing their hands, red eyed, talking to the police. The object of their concern appears, and they become wild with anger at that same object! Every parent, I am sure, relates to this story. Simply put, fear is the most terrible, intense emotion experienced by man. It is no accident that our language is filled with such expressions as "scared stiff," "scared to death," and "frightened out of my mind." The emotion of fear is so terrible that we respond in anger at having been subjected to it.

This is not to say that fear is always bad. God equipped us with the emotion of fear in order to protect us from real danger. The medical profession calls it the "fight or flight response." If there were a lion loose in your house, you *should* feel fear! That very appropriate fear sets off chemical reactions in your body that give you extra energy for the purpose of either defending yourself or for getting away.

THE RESULTS OF IMAGINATION

The fear that destroys us, however, is our fear of the **unreal**; that is, our tendency to let our minds dwell on fantasies, or upon what we think will happen in the future. **Our emotions, being without intelligence, cannot tell the difference between fact and fantasy, and they react just as if what we are thinking about were real.**

This is the reason that you can experience real fear through watching a scary movie or reading a book. **Our emotions respond to whatever we are putting in our minds.** Intense emotions run long enough will begin to break down our bodies, and this is why many people estimate that over two-thirds of all hospital beds are occupied by patients with an "emotional problem." If you understand what caused the motions, you can see that what they really have is a *thinking* problem.

This is why Jesus Christ said, "**Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own**" (Mt. 6:34). Only today is reality; tomorrow, only God knows. Concerning his "thorn in the flesh," the Lord told Paul, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness**" (2 Cor. 12:9). God's grace is sufficient for His children's real present problems, but it is not sufficient for our imagination! If you will examine the things you

spend time worrying about, I think you will discover that 90% never happen. **We are needlessly torturing ourselves through fantasies of the future.**

I once received a call from a woman I knew who was a legal secretary. Choking with sobs, she was barely able to tell her story of how she had returned from a doctor's appointment, where she was informed that she had some early, slight signs of arthritis in her hands.

After listening for a while, I said, "Judy, let me see if I have this straight. In your mind, since you have advanced arthritis, you obviously cannot type. Therefore, you have lost your job as a legal secretary. Being unskilled, you can't get any other job at your age. Since you have no job, you can't pay your rent, and you've been tossed out of your apartment. So there you are on a street corner, wearing rags, and selling pencils. Is that about right?"

After a moment of silence, she said in a low voice, "How did you know?"

Was that scenario true? Of course not. But those were the pictures in Judy's mind, and since her emotions couldn't tell that they were just fantasies, she was an emotional wreck.

It is seldom the real, objective problems and tragedies in our present lives that take us down to anger, self-pity, and depression. It is usually the multiplied dozens of insults, injuries, and rejections in our past that we mull over continuously, combined with our vivid fantasies about the insults, injuries, and rejections that we will receive in our future.

IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF FEAR

At the root of most of the fears that plague us is a **threatened dependency**. The steps to becoming free from fear are:

- 1) Understanding how dependencies affect us,
- 2) Identifying misplaced dependencies, and
- 3) Developing proper biblical dependencies.

God made man as a *dependent* creature, not independent. The essence of sin is the human drive to be independent and self-sufficient apart from God; to be one's own god, in fact. However, Satan's promise to Eve, "*You will be like God*" (Gen. 3:5), was a lie, and man has never since been enslaved to a mad search for identity, significance, and security apart from his Creator. It is a principle of life: **whatever a man depends upon for meaning and purpose in life will control him. Control comes through dependency.**

We can easily see this in drug or alcohol dependency. How can an inanimate thing like a drink control a man? Through that man's dependency upon the drink for meaning and purpose, or to dull his senses against painful emotions. Because he is dependent upon the alcohol, alcohol begins to dominate the man's decision-making. "Should I go to that party?" he asks himself. His decision will be determined by the answer to another question: "Will there be alcohol served?"

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE YOUR IDENTITY?

Most people, however, become trapped through more subtle forms of dependency. How would you answer the question, "Who are you?" Your response will show you where you go to determine your identity. Here are some common answers:

- "I am a mother," you may say. But, what happens when the children leave home? Who are you then? There is no mystery why the largest group who seek counseling for depression are women between the ages of forty and fifty. It is sometimes called "the empty nest syndrome." *It is really a matter of a dependency that has been frustrated.*

- "I am a businessman." What if you lose your business, go bankrupt, get fired, or simply retire? Who are you then? Men die in alarming percentages within eighteen months of retirement. Many simply have no reason to live, because they have lost their identities.

- "I am an athlete." What if you have a career-ending injury? What about getting old?

- "I am a surgeon." What if you have an injury to your hands?

- "I am young and attractive ... the homecoming queen ... a model." What happens as you grow older and no longer look eighteen?

It is obvious from these examples what Solomon meant when he wrote that all life is "vanity." Anything in this life can be taken away from us. Building our meaning and purpose in life upon anything in this creation is exactly what Jesus was talking about when He talked of the foolish man who built his life on sand. There is no such thing as ultimate security in this world apart from Christ.

We will fight tooth and nail to defend our dependencies, but we can never rest. Life becomes an endless struggle, the survival of the fittest. **We live in continual fear of losing our positions.**

Getting back to Joe in the beginning of this booklet, this is exactly what his problem was. Joe was totally dependent upon his occupation for his identity and self-worth. His supervisor, whom he had liked and gotten along well with, had recently been replaced by another supervisor who was highly critical of Joe's work. In fact, he and Joe didn't like each other at all.

As we talked, it became more and more obvious that Joe was totally dependent upon being a success in his work for his significance in life. He feared that he would be rejected by his wife, his children, his friends, and ultimately himself, if he were to lose his position. Since he was afraid to deal directly with his supervisor, he put on a facade of being calm, secure, and friendly, while falling apart inside. His continual fear turned quickly to deep anger and impatience, especially toward subordinate co-workers and his family – situations where he was not required to maintain the act.

There is only one way you can answer the questions, "Who are you?" that has an unshakable foundation: "I am a child of God." Now, you may be a child of God who happens to be a mother, businessman, athlete, and so on; but our eternal identity is settled by your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Anything else in this world can be taken away from you. Nothing can change your identity as a child of God through His love and grace.

THE SOLUTION TO FEAR

If we want to live in freedom from fear, **we must begin to put our total dependencies back where they belong: upon Jesus Christ and His Word.** To every need of the human heart, Jesus answered, "I am."

- Do you need meaning and purpose in life? Truth? **"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall not thirst."** (John 6:35)

- Are you afraid of making decision? Do you need direction in life? **"I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."** (John 8:12)

- Do you fear losing your relationship with God? **"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand."** (John 10:11,27-28)

- Do you hunger to know God? For absolutes that you can count on? **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."** (John 14:6)

• Do you want reality in your Christian life? Assurance that you are doing what God desires? ***"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."*** (John 15:5)

• Do you fear death? Do you grieve over loved ones that have died? ***"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."*** (John 11:25-26)

In every case, the solution to our fears is a focus and a total dependency upon our Lord, whose name is, "I AM." He is eternally present.

DECISIONS THAT LEAD TO FREEDOM

For Joe, the decision was two-fold. First, was he willing to face the fact that his fears were the result of a misplaced dependency upon his work for his identity and significance in life, and to shift that dependency back upon the Lord Jesus Christ? We spent a lot of time in a study of what the Scriptures say about the believer's identity in Christ. Joe's eyes were opened to see that in Christ he was redeemed, reconciled, forgiven, justified, given the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and totally loved and accepted by the Father.

Joe came to a recognition that he was so dependent upon his work for his significance because of his insecurity regarding God's love and acceptance. Now that he was growing in his confidence in his relationship with the Lord, was Joe willing to turn his dependency back to God for his identity? As he responded with faith in these areas, Joe began to experience the promise of Romans 8:15: ***"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit who makes you sons. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"***

Second, was Joe willing to ***"seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,"*** and let God take care of his family's material needs? (Matthew 6:33) Was he willing to stop fantasizing about his supervisor's motives and intentions (which only God knew)? Was Joe ready to stop dwelling on elaborate imaginary scenarios involving the loss of his job? Was Joe willing to live in the present, and to give thanks for the job that he has right now? Was Joe willing to ***"work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men"*** (Colossians 3:23), and leave the results to God?

These are not one-time decisions. They cannot be made in a "New Year's Resolution" frame of mind with a commitment to change, no matter how sincere. The Christian life is lived only in the present, one moment at a time. The only decision that we can

make is whether, at this moment, we are going to live in total dependency (faith) upon the risen Christ who **gave** His life FOR us, so that He could **give** His life TO us, so that he could live His life THROUGH us.

We will not find the solution to our fears and insecurity through the pursuit of financial success. True security is found only in Jesus Christ. This is why Hebrews 13:5-6 tells us, *"Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'* So we may say with confidence, *'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'*"

The ultimate answer to fear is always the love of God. This is why 1 John 4:18 says, ***"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The man who fears is not made perfect in love."***

Regardless of our present situation, one part of the Lord's will for us is clear: ***"Give thanks in all things, for this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus"*** (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Giving thanks forces us to turn our dependencies back on the Lord where they belong, and to live in the present, where we belong.

By grounding his security in the Lord Jesus Christ, Joe found that God has truly not given us a *"spirit of timidity, but a **spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline**"* (2 Timothy 1:7).

Joe found freedom from fear and anger, both, through identifying his misplaced dependencies, and putting them back on the Lord Jesus Christ. This freedom is available to every child of God who will do the same.



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